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Political Burglar Says Harmer Knew of the Chavez Break-ins

By Rick Carroll

Former California Lieutenant Governor John Harmer is "one of many people in high places" who knew about and tried to profit from illegal break-ins of Cesar Chavez' farm labor movement headquarters, confessed political burglar Jerry Ducote claimed yesterday.

The former lieutenant governor denied Ducote's allegations and said they came as an "incredible surprise" to him.

Ducote, at a press conference in the office of his San Jose attorney, refused—for the moment—to identify others who he claims either supported or financed his political burglary spree against the left wing in the late 1960s.

The 40-year-old ex-sheriff's deputy and former Young Republican leader, insisted, however, that former Governor Ronald Reagan and Attorney General Evelle Younger, "to the best of my knowledge were definitely not involved" in a string of 17 burglaries Ducote admits committing.

In earlier statements, Ducote said Salinas lettuce grower Stephen D'Arrigo and Delano grape grower Jack Pandol financed his clandestine crusade to discredit Chavez as a Communist.

The identities of "more people in high places" will be disclosed, Ducote said, at his forthcoming San Jose trial on 15 grand theft charges. A trial date has not been set.

JOHN HARMER
An emphatic denial

Flanked by defense attorney Tom Salciccia, Ducote, clad in a blue leisure suit, nervously smoked cigarets and talked for the first time about Harmer's alleged involvement with the stolen files.

"He got involved through his assistant, Don Gazzanaga, a former public relations man for a Chamber of Commerce in the Los Angeles area," Ducote said.

"I met Gazzanaga in 1967 at a barbecue at the home of Jack Pandol," he added.

Ducote said that then state Senator Harmer's assistant went through the files stolen from the late social reformer Saul Alinsky, and from Chavez.

"Gazzanaga then requested that I go to Los Angeles with the files, which I did," Ducote said.

In 1968, Harmer formzd an organization called Public Research Institute in Los Angeles which was "a vehicle to gain campaign funds." He had decided to run for state attorney general.

"In order to raise money from the farmers he (Harmer) put out a publication that took off on the Chavez organization," Ducote said, "and used the stolen files for the anti-Chavez tract."

Harmer reached at the Public Research Institute office in Roseville, on the outskirts of Sacramento, issued a lengthy denial.

"I categorically deny that I ever authorized, by implication or otherwise, illegal entry or burglary activities on anyone's part in any circumstances at any time," he said.

Harmer, who served only four months as lieutenant governor after Edward Reinecke's resignation, did say, however, that he hired Gazzanaga as an aide, did publish an anti-Chavez newsletter and did write a book, "We Dare Not Fail," in 1968 that included a chapter about the Chavez farm movement.

"But," Harmer said, "I have no recollection of anybody supplying me with documents I hadn't already gathered. I categorically deny that I ever saw or acceded to the use of stolen documents."

The whereabouts of his former aide is unknown, even by Harmer.

Harmer said he disassociated himself last June from Public Research Institute which he said "basically engages in monitoring some energy commission activities." He still maintains offices there, however.

Ducote also claimed at his press conference that the FBI received stolen documents in 1967 from Western Research Foundation, then located on Market street in San Francisco where "I personally delivered the stolen files to Larry Cott on at least 17 occasions."

Both Cott and Charles Bates, special agent in charge of the FBI office in San Francisco, have denied Ducote's charges.

Bates has said the FBI never instigated nor obtained the fruits of the political burglaries.

Cott, who was employed by Western Research at the time, said Ducote never turned over any documentary materials to him.

But Ducote said yesterday that the main reason he got involved in the political burglaries was because he thought he was working for government agencies via Western Research.